

## GOVERNOR (1909-1916 : SPRY) [446]

### JOSEPH HILLSTROM CORRESPONDENCE, 1914-1916

1.4 cu. ft. and 3 reels microfilm

**DESCRIPTION:** As chief executive officer of the state, Governor Spry had the authority to commute the sentences of those convicted of crimes. The conviction and execution of Joseph Hillstrom (Joe Hill) became one of the most controversial criminal cases in Utah history; it generated national and international interest. Letters were sent to Governor Spry's office protesting the execution and/or conviction of Hill for the gunshot murders of grocer J.S. Morrison and his son Arling. Spry was also commended for supporting the conviction and execution of Hill; he was praised for making a courageous stand for justice and for law and order. Correspondence is in the form of letters, postcards, and telegrams.

Although the correspondence defending Hill varied somewhat, the following views were typical: he was innocent; he had an unfair trial; he had jurors who were selected unfairly; he received inadequate counsel; he lacked a motive for the crime; and he was convicted on circumstantial evidence. Many of the letters were from labor unions or members, including Eugene Debs, who felt Hill was being railroaded because of his connections with the labor movement. Replies, to some of the correspondence, from the Governor's Office stated that the communication was filed with the State Board of Pardons who were responsible for granting pardons and commutations; it also stated that a copy of the decision reached by the Supreme Court in the appeal was enclosed.

There is correspondence between President Woodrow Wilson and Governor Spry. A Swedish Minister made an appeal on behalf of Joe Hill, who was a Swedish citizen, to Governor Spry and to President Woodrow Wilson. The President then requested that Governor Spry postpone the execution; Spry granted the request. When Wilson requested a second postponement, the Governor refused and Hill was executed by a firing squad on November 19, 1915.

Several letters offered Governor Spry protection and investigation services. Some were from individuals, others were from agencies. Other miscellaneous letters were simply requests for information, requests for payment of reward or funeral services, religious messages, etc. Virtually all the correspondence is between 1914 and early 1916; there is one letter as late as 1917 from a woman who thought Joe Hill was in prison and wanted to obtain him as farm labor.

**ARRANGEMENT:** Organized by type of correspondence. Thereafter letters are alphabetical by the first letter of the surname, thereunder chronological. Anonymous letters (under A) and organizational letters where a secretary or other contact individual is not specified (under O), are chronological.

**PROCESSING NOTE:** The bulk of the series was transferred to the Archives from the Office of the Governor in 1955. Items commending Governor Spry for the stand he took were received, by the Archives, from the Historical Society in 1989. The series has been repeatedly reorganized. Enclosures and responses have been restored to the correspondence to which they pertain. Undated correspondence, unless a response or enclosure, appears at the end of each alphabet letter. Microfilming of the correspondence occurred during 1992. Archival processing was completed during 1991.

**GAPS IN THE SERIES:** Four letters in the anonymous section are included there because the second page of the letters could not be located. Occasionally there is a response to a letter for which the original correspondence is not present.

## CONTAINER LIST

| Reel | Box | Folder | Description  |
|------|-----|--------|--|
| 1    | 1   | 1      | Swedish Minister's and President Woodrow Wilson's Requests for Postponements of Execution and Spry's Reactions |
| 1    | 1   | 2      | Commendations of Governor Spry and his Replies, A-B  |
| 1    | 1   | 3      | C-D  |
| 1    | 1   | 4      | E-F  |
| 1    | 1   | 5      | G-H  |
| 1    | 1   | 6      | I-K  |
| 1    | 1   | 7      | L-M  |
| 1    | 1   | 8      | N-P  |
| 1    | 1   | 9      | Q-S  |
| 1    | 1   | 10     | T-W  |
| 1    | 1   | 11     | Offers of Investigation, Information, or Protection  |

| <b>Reel</b> | <b>Box</b> | <b>Folder</b> | <b>Description</b>   |
|-------------|------------|---------------|--|
| 1           | 1          | 12            | Protests against the Execution and/or Conviction of Joe Hill; A: July, Sept. 1914; Aug.-Sept. 1915 |
| 1           | 1          | 13            | A: Oct.-Nov. 16, 1915; n.d.  |
| 1           | 1          | 14            | Anonymous  |
| 1           | 1          | 15            | B: July-Aug. 1914; Jan.-Aug. 1915  |
| 1           | 1          | 16            | B: Sept. 1-15, 1915  |
| 1           | 1          | 17            | B: Sept. 16-30, 1915   |
| 1           | 1          | 18            | B: Oct.-Nov. 17, 1915  |
| 1           | 1          | 19            | C: Aug.-Sept. 1914; July-Sept. 15, 1915  |
| 1           | 1          | 20            | C: Sept. 16-30, 1915   |
| 1           | 1          | 21            | C: Oct.-Nov. 15, 1915  |
| 1           | 1          | 22            | D: July-Aug 1914; July-Sept. 15, 1915  |
| 1           | 1          | 23            | D: Sept. 16-Nov. 17, 1915; n.d.  |
| 1           | 1          | 24            | E  |
| 2           | 1          | 25            | F: Aug. 1914; Apr.-Sept. 15, 1915  |
| 2           | 1          | 26            | F: Sept. 16-Nov. 17, 1915; n.d.  |
| 2           | 1          | 27            | G: Aug. 1914; Aug.-Sept. 15, 1915  |
| 2           | 1          | 28            | G: Sept. 16-Nov. 17, 1915; n.d.  |
| 2           | 1          | 29            | H: July-Sept. 1914; Mar.-Sept. 15, 1915  |
| 2           | 1          | 30            | H: Sept 16-30, 1915  |
| 2           | 1          | 31            | H: Oct.-Dec. 1915; n.d.  |
| 2           | 1          | 32            | I  |
| 2           | 1          | 33            | J: Aug. 1914; Aug.-Sept. 1915  |
| 2           | 1          | 34            | J: Oct-Nov. 16, 1915; n.d.   |
| 2           | 1          | 35            | K: Aug., Oct. 1914; Aug.-Sept. 20, 1915  |
| 2           | 1          | 36            | K: Sept. 21-Nov. 18, 1915; n.d.  |
| 2           | 1          | 37            | L: July-Aug. 1914; May-Sept. 1915  |
| 2           | 1          | 38            | L: Oct.-Nov. 1915  |
| 2           | 1          | 39            | M: July-Aug., Nov. 1914; Mar.-Sept. 15, 1915   |
| 2           | 1          | 40            | M: Sept. 16-30, 1915   |
| 2           | 1          | 41            | M: Oct.-Nov. 1915; n.d.  |
| 2           | 1          | 42            | N  |
| 2           | 1          | 43            | O  |
| 2           | 1          | 44            | Organizations, no contact individual   |
| 2           | 1          | 45            | P: July-Aug. 1914; July-Sept. 15, 1915   |
| 2           | 1          | 46            | P: Sept. 16-30, 1915   |
| 2           | 1          | 47            | P: Oct.-Nov. 15, 1915; n.d.  |
| 2           | 1          | 48            | Q  |
| 2           | 1          | 49            | R: Aug.-Sept. 1914; July -Sept. 20,  |

| <b>Reel</b> | <b>Box</b> | <b>Folder</b> | <b>Description</b>                        |
|-------------|------------|---------------|---|
|             |            |               | 1915                                      |
| 3           | 1          | 50            | R: Sept. 21-Nov. 17, 1915; n.d.           |
| 3           | 1          | 51            | S: Aug.-Sept. 1914; July-Sept. 15, 1915   |
| 3           | 1          | 52            | S: Sept. 16-24, 1915                      |
| 3           | 1          | 53            | S: Sept. 25-30, 1915                      |
| 3           | 2          | 1             | S: Oct.-Nov. 18, 1915; n.d.               |
| 3           | 2          | 2             | T: Aug. 1914; Aug.-Sept. 15, 1915         |
| 3           | 2          | 3             | T: Sept. 16-Nov. 16, 1915; n.d.           |
| 3           | 2          | 4             | U   |
| 3           | 2          | 5             | V   |
| 3           | 2          | 6             | W: Aug.-Sept. 1914; Aug. 1-Sept. 15, 1915 |
| 3           | 2          | 7             | W: Sept. 16-30, 1915                      |
| 3           | 2          | 8             | W: Oct.-Nov. 17, 1915; n.d.               |
| 3           | 2          | 9             | Y   |
| 3           | 2          | 10            | Z   |
| 3           | 2          | 11            | Miscellaneous                             |